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North-South Supply Chain Alliances Between Developed and Less Developed Countries: A Feasible Fresh Produce Strategy?

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Abstract

Cross hemisphere (north-south) producer alliances are one way of supplying seasonal fresh produce for an extended period. The persimmon (*Diospyros kaki*) is a fruit that is widely consumed in Asia. An alliance of Australian growers, the Australian Persimmon Export Company (APEC), has been developing an international supply chain for its branded persimmons for about 12 years. An APEC alliance with a northern hemisphere supplier would allow supply of its brands for a longer season. In Baoji, Shaanxi province, western China, small areas of the same varieties of persimmon as marketed by APEC are replacing traditional varieties. Baoji persimmon growers are quite poor and disadvantaged by their remoteness from wealthier consumers in coastal provinces. Yet, with assistance, their fruit could meet APEC quality standards. Since early 2003, APEC and the Baoji local government have been exploring how to train local Chinese persimmon farmers to use the APEC production and marketing system. APEC's chain partners in markets such as Singapore and Malaysia could then receive high quality persimmons in early October, when supply is scarce. Returns would be enough to both increase the income of Baoji persimmon growers and invest in further market development that would benefit APEC and Baoji as chain partners. Pilot scale results to date have indicated that this approach to supply chain building is feasible, however, the ability to fund commercial scale application of the concept by all partners may prove to be a short-term limitation.

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